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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UK](#) [GG](#) [RU](#) [AZ](#) [AM](#)  
SUBJECT: GUAM ALLIES GANG UP ON RUSSIA DURING THINKTANK  
SEMINAR

Classified By: Poloff Masha Herbst for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (U) A Russian analyst who spouted anti-Western rhetoric at a local thinktank seminar this week in Yerevan found himself outnumbered when panelists from Georgia (including a former foreign minister), Ukraine and Azerbaijan ganged up on him during their speeches and particularly during the question-and-answer period. The analyst had complained that Russia was being "forced out" of its traditional "sphere of influence." He also cautioned the South Caucasus countries against greater involvement with NATO, and said that the U.S. is unequivocally hostile to Russia. Though the Georgians and the Russian traded barbs during the seminar, the September 27 arrest of GRU officers did not come up. An Azeri panelist took a dim view of the current Nagorno Karabakh negotiation efforts and suggested the road to peace led through Europe.  
END SUMMARY.

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RUSSIAN ANALYST: THE WEST IS A THREAT  
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¶2. (U) Vyacheslav Igrunov, the director of the Institute for Humanities and Political Studies in Moscow, wasted no time in disabusing seminar participants of the notion that Russia could be a team player in the South Caucasus. He said that, while the idea that Russia, Turkey, the U.S. and the EU could work together in the region was a pleasant one, "in reality, it is unfortunately quite different." Igrunov said the U.S. obviously considered Russia an enemy. He accused the U.S. of trying to force Russia out of the former Soviet space. "The proof is Vice President Cheney's statement in Vilnius, which categorized Russia with Syria and Iran. No further proof is needed," Igrunov said. He accused the U.S. of orchestrating and paying for the Orange and Rose Revolutions. Igrunov then launched into a diatribe about the war in Iraq, predicting that Iraq would become a "terrorism greenhouse," and saying the "Muslim world won't forgive the U.S. if the U.S. will not learn lessons from Iraq ... and goes to war in Iran."

¶3. (U) Though he avoided saying outright that the countries of the South Caucasus should not join NATO, Igrunov tried to build a strong case against NATO involvement in the region. He said NATO action in the South Caucasus might be "irreversible," and suggested that Georgia would be used as a launching site for war in Iran. He said Russia feared NATO would turn against it. Throughout Igrunov's speech, panelists from Georgia and Ukraine rolled their eyes at one another and whispered.

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¶4. (U) Former Georgian Foreign Minister Irakli Menagarishvili spoke next, giving a measured presentation during which he argued that the West must become more involved in regional politics. He said the EU and NATO should "continuously" keep the South Caucasus on their radars, but also stressed that all stakeholders should be involved -- including Russia. He looked and sounded a bit like a school teacher -- perhaps on purpose, and the better to follow Igrunov's whiny tirade -- when he peered over his glasses at the audience and said, "I'm sure Russia can and should play a constructive, positive role." Menagarishvili refrained from provoking Igrunov until right before the end of his presentation, when he noted pointedly that the concept of spheres of influence was outdated and should be abandoned.

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AZERI SCHOLAR: NK TALKS WILL FAIL WITHOUT EU INTEGRATION

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¶5. (C) Leila Alieva, head of the Azeri Center for National and International Studies, took a dim view of the current NK settlement process. She said domestic reform in both Armenia and Azerbaijan was a prerequisite for peace. "The resolution attempts are predetermined to fail, because when you have two parties equally convinced of the correctness of their views, and both parties can bring equal evidence, this is a deadlock," Alieva said. She said the EU should promote reform in Armenia and Azerbaijan and "bring them closer to Europe." Alieva also chastised Russia for its heavy hand in the region, and said it should wait to act until it can offer a better alternative to Western integration and development. (NOTE: Alieva has worked with the Spectrum Center in the

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past, but her presence at the seminar was still remarkable. Spectrum Center Director Gayane Novikova said the organization had worked out an agreement by which border guards would not stamp Alieva's passport, and that the Center had provided her with a security detail. END NOTE.)

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PANELISTS GANG UP ON THE RUSSIAN

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¶6. (U) Almost all the questions posed during the question-and-answer period were for Igrunov. Ukrainian panelist Mykhailo Samas cited Russia's December 2005 gas shutdown, and said, "Who is forcing Russia from Ukraine and Georgia, if not Russia itself?" Other panelists piled on to the same question. Shalva Pichkhadze, chairman of "Georgia for NATO" and a former advisor to Eduard Shevardnadze, asked what, exactly, Russia would consider to be "fair play." Igrunov ignored the last question. He said the U.S. had coerced Ukraine not to join the Unified Economic Space by threatening isolation from the West, and accused Washington and Brussels of pressuring Moldova to back away from Russia's federalization plan the day after the Moldovan government agreed to it. Igrunov then turned his attention to GUAM, complaining that "The alliance was forged without inviting Russia. Authoritarian regimes were invited. It was a double standard."

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COMMENT

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¶7. (C) The attitude of the panelists towards each other was a small-scale reflection of large-scale reality. Ukraine and Georgia vocally contradicted Russia's claims, Azerbaijan threw in a barb here and there, and Armenia was silent. The question is: How much longer will Armenia be silent? Armenian suffering is a continuing side effect of tension between Russia and Georgia, and the tension is only

increasing. But given Russian dominance of the Armenian energy sector, growing economic ties between the two countries and Russian troops guarding Armenia's southern border, speaking out against Russia remains a risky proposition.

GODFREY